

Golden Gate Audubon Society Newsletter

Volume 79, No 7 July/August 1997

## Counting the Chicks After They've Hatched

*by John Gibbons*

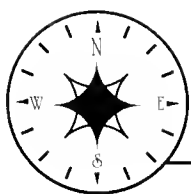
**T**he tree collaring project at Stow Lake has been a huge success, says Nancy DeStefanis, project coordinator. It's the height of the breeding season for the Great Blue Herons at the lake in Golden Gate Park, and DeStefanis reports that there are two nests on the island with four chicks each!

Since 1993, when Great Blue Herons decided that the small island in Stow Lake was prime rookery real estate, they were paid several visits by raccoons during the breeding season. As predators of both eggs and chicks, the raccoons were naturally unwelcome, and something had to be done to protect the nests. In September of '96, many volunteers, together with DeStefanis, who is also the San Francisco coordinator for the Colonial Waterbird Monitoring Program of the SF Bay Bird Observatory, installed 35 sheet metal collars on the island's trees to prevent the raccoons from climbing them. And they seem to be working.

The eggs in nest #2 began hatching, DeStefanis says, on the week of April 15th, finishing the week of the 26th. Nest #1 began receiving its fuzzy additions the week of May 4th, with the last little guy arriving the week of May 14th. "If we had not installed the tree collars when we did, there may not have been a single



*Continued on page 8*



# Field Trips Calendar

**G**AS field trips are conducted by experienced birders who wish to share their knowledge and love of birds with others. All trips are free of charge (except for entrance fees that may be charged by regional, state, or national parks) and are open to everyone, regardless of membership in the National Audubon Society or Golden Gate chapter.

## **SATURDAY–SUNDAY, JULY 26–27, YOSEMITE ALPINE ECOLOGY.**

Due to its popularity, this trip will be **by reservation only**, and the numbers participating will be strictly limited. This is not primarily a birding trip, but will emphasize general alpine ecology. All participants should be in good physical condition, with reasonable experience in hiking and climbing at elevations of 8,000 to 11,000 feet, where we will be. Each day you should bring lunch, ample fluids, hat, water repellent jacket, sun lotion, mosquito repellent, and good walking shoes or boots with treaded soles (no smooth-soled tennis or other shoes, please). We will possibly be traversing snow fields after the heavy winter snows in the Sierra. **See June Gull for other details.** For trip reservations and meeting details call – Leader: George Peyton (510) 444-3131 weekdays. \$(\*)

## **THURSDAY–SUNDAY, AUGUST 7–10, BACKPACKING TRIP IN LASSEN VOLCANIC NATIONAL PARK.**

We will backpack in 3 miles to Snag Lake and spend 3 nights in primitive camping by a stream near a large meadow. We should see flocks of mixed warblers and other songbirds that summer in Lassen, plus resident birds of the mountains, Bald Eagles, and perhaps some migrating shorebirds. We will be above 6,000 ft elevation in beautiful country! To avoid impact on fragile habitat, this trip is limited to 12 people. Everyone will be responsible for his/her own gear and food, although some cooperative or shared meals may be arranged. Leaders: David Rice and Robin Pulich. For details call David Rice at (510) 527-7210. \$(\*)

## **SATURDAY, AUGUST 16, SHOREBIRDS AT HAYWARD REGIONAL SHORELINE.**

Meet at 10 a.m. at the Hayward Shoreline Interpretive Center, 4901 Breakwater Avenue, for this half-day trip. August is one of the best times to study shorebirds, and there are few Bay Area shorebird locations better than Hayward Regional Shoreline. Depending on the species, we should see some first-fall birds in their once-in-a-lifetime bright juvenal plumage, as well as adults still in breeding plumage or in various stages of molt. Directions: from Oakland, take I-880 south to Hwy. 92

(Hayward/San Mateo Bridge exit) towards San Mateo. Exit at Clawiter, cross Clawiter onto Breakwater Ct., and turn left onto Breakwater Avenue. Leader: Lewis Cooper (510) 526-1773.

## **MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 1 (LABOR DAY), COASTAL SAN FRANCISCO – EARLY FALL MIGRANTS.**

Meet at 7:30 a.m. at the parking lot on Merrie Way (a stub street off the north end of Great Highway) above the Cliff House. We will bird the western edge of San Francisco from Sutro Bath to Lake Merced. Labor Day walks in recent years have yielded a variety of shorebirds (Wandering Tattler, Black Turnstone, Willet, Marbled Godwit), some early fall warblers, Sooty Shearwaters, Cooper's Hawks, and kinglets. Most summer breeders (usually including Hooded Orioles) can be seen. In observance of Labor Day, we will avoid working too hard for the birds and expect them to come to us instead. We will finish at noon. Beginners welcome. Be prepared for cool weather. Leader: Harry Fuller (415) 668-8229.

## **SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 6, COASTAL SAN FRANCISCO.**

Meet at 8 a.m. at the parking lot between South and Middle Lakes (Chain of Lakes) near the 41st Avenue and Lincoln Way entrance to Golden Gate Park. We will bird in the park, at Lake Merced, and in Golden Gate

National Recreation Area in search of warblers, flycatchers and vagrants. Bring lunch and be prepared for cold weather near the coast. Leader: Dan Murphy (415) 564-0074.

**WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 10,  
MINI-TRIP TO ALAMEDA  
SOUTH SHORE AND  
SURROUNDING AREAS.**

Meet at 9 a.m. in Alameda at Broadway and Shoreline Drive. We will be looking for shorebirds and waterfowl. This trip often produces Clapper Rail and a dozen or more species of shorebirds. Bring lunch and a scope if you have one. Leaders: Anna Wilcox (510)-351-9301 and Jean-Marie Spoelman.

**SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 13,  
COYOTE HILLS REGIONAL  
PARK.**


Meet at 8:30 a.m. at the last parking lot for this half-day trip. Expect to see migrating land birds, resident marsh birds like Common Moorhen and Common Yellowthroat, and perhaps some early migrant dabbling ducks in terrible plumage. This location is also good for raptors including White-tailed Kite and Northern Harrier. From the East Bay, take I-880 south to Rte. 84/Dumbarton Bridge exit. Turn right and continue west. Exit at Paseo Padre Pkwy. Turn right and continue north one mile to Patterson Ranch Road and follow signs to Coyote Hills. Co-leaders: Rusty Scalf (510) 595-8319 and Bob Lewis (510) 845-5001. \$(\*)

## Field Trip Reports

*As space permits, the Gull will now be featuring reports of GGAS field trips.*

**S**an Francisco Bird Blitz, March 22, 1997 (Alan Hopkins). Birders from Portland, Oregon, San Diego, and Los Gatos participated in this mad but fun dash through the City. Alan and crew found 112 species including a Cassin's Kingbird!.....**Sunol Regional Wilderness**, April 5, 1997 (Ron Lindeman and Leora Feeney). Sixty-one species of birds and a nice variety of wildflowers, including Lindley's Blazing Star, were seen on this trip. The participants enjoyed close views of a singing Canyon Wren as well.....**Bothe-Napa State Park**, April 19, 1997 (Peter Allen). Poor light on a dark day made birding difficult, but splendid views of a Pileated Woodpecker made for a wonderful trip.....**Mines Road**, April 19, 1997 (George Bing). After carpooling at the meeting location, we had a caravan of 16 cars (ugh) plus one intrepid birder/biker. Despite these difficult conditions, the trip was successful, with most of the trip's "specialty" birds being found with the exception of Lawrence's Goldfinch. There were no warblers or vireos.....**Tilden Regional Park**, April 20, 1997 (Lewis Cooper). The signature birds of the area were in full song: Black-headed Grosbeak, Wilson's Warbler, Orange-crowned Warbler, and Warbling Vireo. In addition, good views were had of 3 species of hummingbirds (Allen's, Anna's and Rufous), perched male birds showing off their gorgets. Although Wilson's Warblers were abundant, Orange-crowned Warblers appeared down in numbers, as were California Quail. A resident Cooper's Hawk put on a bit of a show having captured prey, then demonstrating its "mantling" on a perch. 

**SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 14,  
REDWOODS REGIONAL PARK.**

Meet at 8 a.m., Redwood Road entrance, last parking lot for this half-day trip. We hope to see woodpeckers, Brown Creepers, Purple Finches, and perhaps some migrants. Take the Warren Freeway (Hwy. 13), exit onto Redwood Road, and proceed east about 3 miles to the park entrance. Leader: Rusty Scalf (510) 595-8319. \$(\*) 

Trips marked with a (\$) go to parks or other sites which require an entrance fee. Carpooling arrangements will be attempted for trips marked with a (\*). See below. Problems, etc.: If you need a ride or can take a passenger, if you need information and have difficulty reaching a field trip leader, if you have suggestions for trips, or **if you are interested in leading a trip**, call Lillian Fujii (510) 236-4167, Field Trips Committee Chair.

## Life and Death in the Backyard

by Russ Wilson

Glancing out at the kitchen window, my attention was drawn to a flurry of feathered activity out on our patio. Looking closer, I realized that a Scrub Jay was attacking another bird, pecking at it mercilessly. I dashed out the back door and was nearly within reach of the birds when the jay reluctantly gave up its quarry and flew into a nearby tree. The quarry - a full-feathered immature Mourning Dove. Well.....it had been fully feathered. After the relentless jabbing by the jay's javelin-like beak, there were a few secondary feathers missing from one wing, and several breast and back feathers were scattered about.

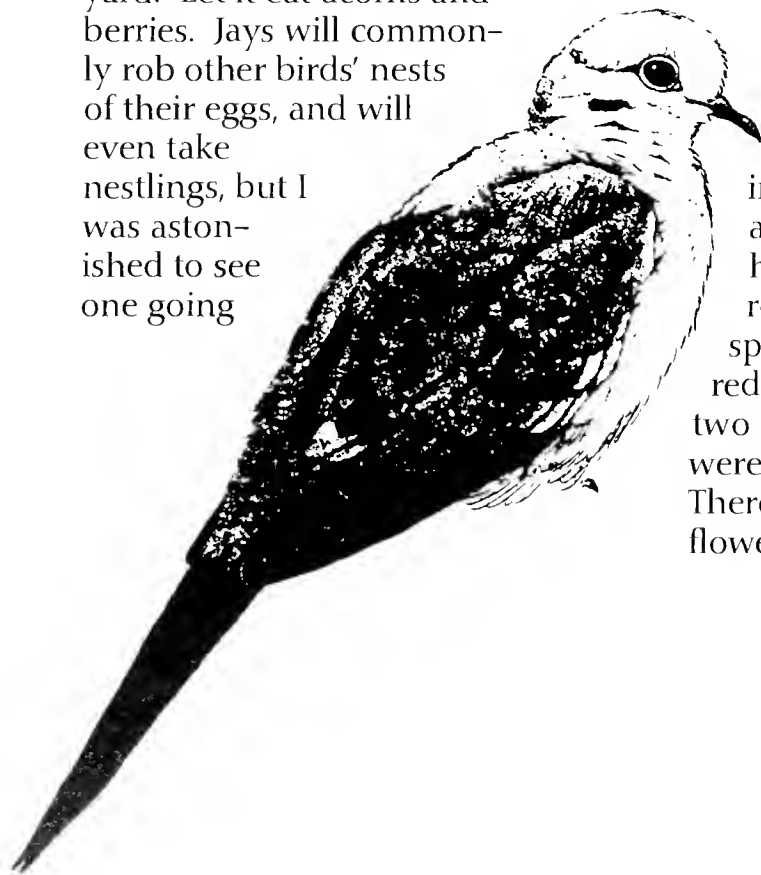
I could have stood back and watched the drama unfold, accepting it as a part of nature. Had it been a "bird of prey" attacking the dove, I would have done so. That's how they survive, but a Scrub Jay? Not in my backyard! Let it eat acorns and berries. Jays will commonly rob other birds' nests of their eggs, and will even take nestlings, but I was astonished to see one going

after a bird nearly its own size!

Mourning Doves are common, but nevertheless I felt compelled to rescue the hapless critter. Its breast was raw, and it was gasping for air when I picked it up. I placed it in a secluded spot in the front yard while I mixed up a gourmet gruel of crushed birdseed and milk. The jay, in the meantime, returned to the scene and searched vainly for the breakfast that I had denied it.

The dove appeared to be breathing normally again, and after a little inducement it was happy to take the nourishment I had prepared. I could see the throat feathers rippling with each swallow, so I knew that the therapy was working. It worked so well in fact that my patient suddenly realized it was free, flapped its wings, and disappeared over the fence, some ten yards away. About a half hour later, I saw it reunited with a parent, and the two of them flew off together.

This same day, there was an even greater event taking place next door. One of the many deer that wander through our yard, munching its way through shrubs and flowers, has become so habituated to an urban environment that it chose a quiet spot behind our neighbor's redwood tree to give birth to two fawns. When last seen, they were nursing and doing well. There go more of our plants and flowers!



## Birdathon News

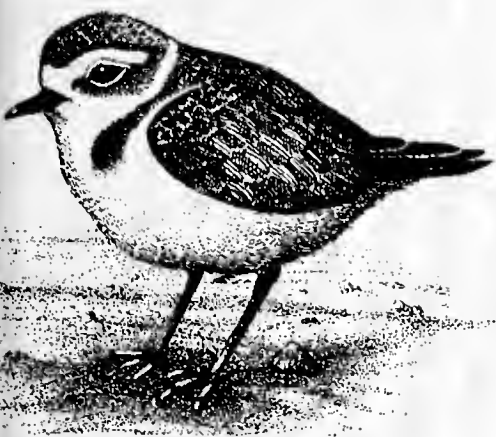
The results are in: Alan Hopkins and the Loonatics spotted an awe-inspiring 190 species in Monterey County; the Old Coots (David Rice, and Paul & Helen Green) birded Yuba County and came in with 82 species; the Uncommon Biologists of City College saw a respectable 101; the Friends of Lake Merced had a very nice 40 species in just 3 hours of birding the lake; Dan Murphy and his M.Ob. listed 110; and the East Bay Trippers had a great 126 species. All in all, a very successful birdathon. Thanks to all of you who pledged for our teams and sent in contributions. And remember, it's never too late! If you would like to contribute, simply send a check to the GGAS office.

The real winners of this year's birdathon are the two programs that will receive funding: Audubon Adventures and the Panama Committee. Thanks again to all birdathon supporters who believe in education as a means of turning folks, young and old, on to birding and giving them a sense of the value of habitat and the importance of protecting it.

Now that Birdathon 1997 is over, it's time to start thinking ahead to Birdathon 1998. It's been a real challenge to coor-

## Conservation News and Thoughts

by Arthur Feinstein and Carolyn Kolka



minate the birdathon I've learned much about trying to get birders to form teams and people in general to donate time and/or money. In 1998 I would like to put my experience of this year to good use and organize a bigger and better birdathon. We might engage New York Audubon in a birdathon challenge, and we should really try and beat Mt. Ranier Audubon - they raised \$15,000!! But these are tall orders, and I'll need your help. We'll form a committee in the fall, so keep a lookout for an announcement in the *Gull*.

One last item: Alan Hopkins has created a wonderful tribute to the Snowy Plover in his engaging design on the Birdathon T-shirt. Birders who gathered \$100.00 or more in pledges will receive a T-shirt as a prize. They will also be available for purchase at the GGAS office. Get one soon, before they're all snatched up.

**T**he GGAS office suffered a break-in on May 9th in which the computer containing all of our programs and address list for the Armchair Activist (our monthly action alert newsletter) was stolen! Ninety of the 150 names on the list were on a back-up disk but the rest are gone. **We're asking those**

**of you Armchair Activist members who do not receive a May copy to please contact the office so that we can put your name back on the list.**

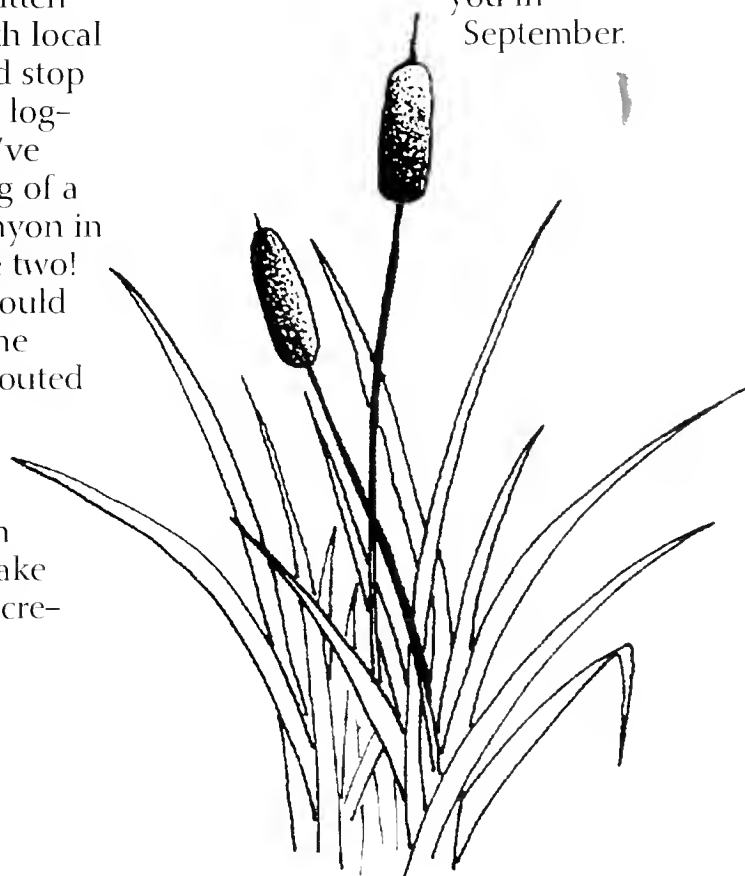
Sorry for the inconvenience, but we do want to build up our numbers again. Writing a letter a month on an important conservation issue does make a difference, and we have written on a variety of subjects both local and national. We've helped stop some of the deadly salvage logging sales last year, and we've helped prevent the opening of a road through a pristine canyon in Anza Borrego, just to name two!

Another issue that we would like you to be aware of is the Estuary Plan that is being touted for developing the Lake Merritt Channel and its surrounding land, as a central connection between the Oakland Estuary and Lake Merritt for public access, recre-

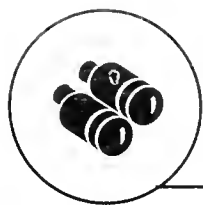
ation, and large public events such as the Festival of the Lake and the Pan Pacific Exposition. This channel is a sensitive and important feeding and resting area used by hundreds of wintering waterfowl and breeding birds. The edges of the channel contain rich salt marsh vegetation that has been depleted in the Bay

Area. The Estuary Plan contains no wording that acknowledges the ecological value of the channel and its salt marsh. Please be alert to anything that you read or hear about this area, and please make your concerns known by calling the Port of Oakland or your councilperson if you live in Oakland. See you in September.

**GGAS would like to thank Berkeley Systems for their generous donation of a Mac IIci computer.**







April 28 to May 19

This month's *Observations* column is somewhat shorter and covers a relatively quiet period. Towards the end, however, the first trickle of anticipated "eastern" vagrants began to appear, raising expectations for the coming weeks.

## Albatrosses to Gulls

Seabird highlights this month included a high of 55 Black-footed Albatross recorded on a pelagic trip to the Cordell Banks, SON, on May 4 (DN). Other interesting sightings on this trip included 5 Northern Fulmar and a Flesh-footed Shearwater. An interesting

report was of a Laysan Albatross found wandering in South San Francisco, SM, on April 24 (per PJM). This bird was taken for rehabilitation to Berkeley and will hopefully be released at some future date.

A lingering Blue-winged Teal was present at Pescadero Marsh, SM, on April 28 (MB). A pair of Harlequin Ducks seen May 4 (BC), on the Silver Fork River, a tributary of the American River in El Dorado, raised expectations that they may breed at this location. Unfortunately, they were not subsequently reported. A short sea-watch from Pigeon Point, SM, on May 3 saw 335 alternate-plumaged Red Phalaropes moving offshore (RST). Another spring Semipalmated Sandpiper was at the Calabazas Ponds near Sunnyvale, SC, on May 12 (MR). One of the month's highlights was an alternate-plumaged Little Gull present at the Stockton Sewage Ponds, SJ, on May 9 (DY). Other notable gull sightings included up to 20 Sabine's Gulls noted on the previously reported Cordell Bank trip, May 4 (DN).

## Swifts to Sparrows

Another interesting sighting this month was a migrating flock of 17 Black Swifts reported from Windy Hill Open Space Preserve, near Woodside, SM, on May 17 (PJM). A Tropical Kingbird was reported from Berkeley, ALA, on May 2 (JE), while Cassin's Kingbirds continued to be seen in Santa Clara, with birds remaining near Gilroy throughout much of the period (SR) and another single bird at the Guadalupe River

near Alviso on May 2 (SR). Another spring report of Gray Flycatcher came from Ed Levin CP, SCL, on May 6 (SR). An unusual and extremely late report of Northern Shrike was of one seen at the Sequoia NP, TUL, on May 4 (SG). The first Red-eyed Vireo of the spring was reported from Princeton, SM, on May 18 (RST).

Again this month notable warbler sightings were pretty much nonexistent with a few exceptions, including,

### *Black & White Warbler*

May 10 Mount Diablo SP, CC (JDP)

May 17 Lighthouse, PRNS, MRN (ML)

### *Northern Parula*

May 13 AMSP, MON (per MPRBA).

### *American Redstart*

May 17 Fishdocks, PRNS, MRN (ML).

A Great-tailed Grackle was present at Mesa Lake, Mesa RP, SAC, on May 2 (LE), and a single bird was present at the Kmudowski Beach, MON, on May 3 (DS). A **Painted Bunting** was reported from April 27 to 30 (DO) at the San Bruno Mountain SP, SM. This species is an extremely rare vagrant in our area and is more usually treated as escapes. This record will hopefully be submitted to the CBRC for review. A female Lark Bunting was seen along Lobitas Creek Rd, SM, on May 10 (RST).

Black-chinned and Rufous-crowned Sparrows were again commonly reported this period

The monthly *Observation* column is generated from reports made to the Northern California Bird Box and Monterey Peninsula Rare Bird Alert, (MPRBA) or to the author. Some sightings are unconfirmed, and numbers of birds are often best regarded as estimates or "best guesses". In general, birds in boldface are very rare in our region, geographically or seasonally. Many of these are currently reviewed by the California Bird Records Committee (CBRC). Observers are encouraged to provide written and/or photographic documentation to the CBRC, c/o Michael Patten, P.O. Box 51959, Riverside, CA 92517-2959 for any species currently on the review list. A list of review species can also be obtained from the CBRC secretary at the address above.

This data is made possible by all the observers who contributed their reports to the Northern California Bird Box and Monterey Peninsula Rare Bird Alert, (MPRBA).

If anybody has photos of birds reported in this column and would let us post them on our Web site, we would be very appreciative. Please feel free to contact me to discuss.

Abbreviations for Observers: MB, Marjorie Bourret; BC, Bea Colley; JE, Joe Eaton; LE, Leo Edson; KH, Keith Hansen; ML, Marty Lichen; PJM, Peter Metropolis; DN, Dan Nelson; DO, Doug Oldhouse; JDP, JD Philips; MR, Mike Rogers; SR, Steve Rottenborn; DS, Doug Shaw; RST, Ron Thorn; DY, David Yee.

Abbreviations for counties: ALA, Alameda; MON, Mono; MRN, Marin; SF, San Francisco; SJ, San Joaquin; SM, San Mateo; SAC, Sacramento; SB, San Bernardino; SC, Santa Clara; SON, Sonoma; TUL, Tulare.

Other abbreviations used: AMSP, Andrew Molera State Park, Monterey; CCRS, Coyote Creek Riparian Station; PRNS- Point Reyes National Seashore, Marin; per MPRBA - per Monterey Peninsula Rare Bird Alert.

## Observations Volunteer Needed!

The monthly observations column is one of the more popular pieces in the *Gull*. But after 2 years of writing the column, Hugh Cotter finds it time to hang up his pen and pursue other ventures, and we are there for looking for someone to take on this task. In writing this column, it's desirable to have a good understanding of local distribution and abundance of species and the ability to analyze the bare information from the Northern California Bird Box and skills to present this in a meaningful and understandable way for many people. If you are interested, please call the GGAS office at (510) 843-2222.

from many locations. A White-throated Sparrow was noted near King City, SB, on May 3 (KH). A Brewer's Sparrow near Pilarcitos Creek, Half Moon Bay, on May 18 (RST) was notable as this species is very rare on the coast.

## Correction

In the March *Observations* column, we reported the Eastern Phoebe found at the Coyote Point State Park, SM. This bird, the third county record, was originally found by Ron Thorn. Our apologies to Ron for this omission.

While we do our utmost to ensure correct reports and credits to observers, sometimes mistakes and omissions do occur. We will also do our best to correct these errors when they are pointed out to us.

## Learn your birds not by species, but by class!

**E**vening bird classes taught by Joe Morlan through San Francisco City College will be starting September 2, 3, and 4. All classes meet from 7:00 pm to 9:30 pm in room 222, Marina Middle School, 3500 Fillmore at Bay Street. Free parking is in the lot off of Bay St. on the east side of the building. Slides illustrate all classes, and the text for all classes is *A Field Guide to the Birds of North America*, second edition, by the National Geographic Society.

**Field Ornithology I** meets on Tuesdays. It is an introduction to birds and birding, combining basic field skills with the study of bird ecology, biology, and behavior. Part A (EA101) starts September 2 and ends October 14; part B (EA105) starts October 21 and ends December 9.

**Field Ornithology II** meets on Wednesdays. It is a continuing in-depth study of the identification and status of North American land birds including warblers, buntings, and sparrows. Part A (EA110) starts September 3 and ends October 15; part B (EA115) starts October 22 and ends December 10.

**Field Ornithology III** meets on Thursdays. It is a continuing study of terns, alcids, and hawks. Part A (EA120) starts September 4 and ends October 16; part B (EA125) starts October 23 and ends December 11.

These classes are endorsed by the Golden Gate Audubon Society. Optional field trips on weekends may be arranged by the instructor. Please bring binoculars and field guides to class if you have them.

Fees are \$90 for each seven-week course. For enrollment and information call (415) 561-1860.

## Gifts and Bequests

### Birdathon:

Takeshi Baba, May Blaisdell, J.M. Davidson, Charles Davies, Rebecca Freed, Dorthy Furseth, Patricia Gannon, Steven Hayashi & Lillian Fujii, Seizaburo Kawano, Margaret Murphy, Nancy Smith, Martha Spriggs, A.W. & Susan Walenta.

### In memory of:

Janet Elliott & Toey White  
in memory of Dorothy  
Snowden

The Society welcomes gifts in general or gifts in honor of or in memory of relatives and friends. Such gifts will be used as specified by the donor or, if unspecified, at the discretion of the GGAS Board of Directors. This includes their use of general GGAS activities or for special programs of the Society. Please send your gift in the form of a check made out to Golden Gate Audubon Society, 2530 San Pablo Avenue, Suite G, Berkeley, CA 94702. All gifts are tax deductible. The Society is also appreciative of any bequests. Such bequests should specify as recipient the Golden Gate Audubon Society, Inc. All gifts, donations and bequests will be acknowledged in *The Gull*, as well as personally on behalf of the Society by the Secretary.

## Counting the Chicks

heron chick this year," she speculates. Raccoons are, after all, rather persistent. "A family of six were sighted on the island back in January, and I saw some swimming to the island on February 12th."

DeStefanis recently shared the wonderful heron families with 30 fourth graders from St. Dominick's Grammar School in San Francisco. "They were thrilled to see the chicks flapping like crazy and hopping around!" It's great when you can offer this kind of a direct learning experience, she says. She was also invited by seventh grader Kassie O'Donnell to come and speak to her class and another at Roosevelt Middle School in the city. "If I can get these kids interested in nature, they'll be more conscientious about the environment when they grow up, which is great since they're the ones who will be taking care of it long after I'm gone." As testament to

her efforts, the letters she received from the students prove that at the very least she got them interested.

"That's what we have to do," she says. "We have to make this connection for the kids between the environment and their responsibilities. That's the challenge." DeStefanis explains that one of her roles at Stow Lake is to get people tuned onto nature. When people are excited about something, she believes, they're inspired to learn more and help out.

As living proof of what "helping out" can do, the Great Blue Heron families at Stow Lake continue to grow and prosper. Compared to rather grim results in the past, DeStefanis points to the tree collar results and the herons' progress as hope for the future. "All eight chicks are thriving, so I'm very optimistic that they'll all fledge successfully!"



### ROSTER

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### WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

As a member of National Audubon Society, you are automatically enrolled in the local chapter, Golden Gate Audubon Society. Chapter benefits include receipt of *The Gull*, access to field trips and programs, and the opportunity to volunteer. Call the office if you have any questions.

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